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# The World-Class University That Our City Has Become

*Its Intellectual Clout Equals London's, But Will Politicians Be the Wiser?*

By Amitai Etzioni

WHEN I ACCEPTED a professorship at The George Washington University in 1980, several of my colleagues wondered: "Leaving Columbia University — to move to Washington?" Washington was a notoriously un-academic and a-intellectual town, one of the few world capitals without a "major" university. I am still asked that question, but much less often. Over the last few years, Washington crossed an admittedly ill-defined threshold beyond which cities qualify as major centers of research, higher learning and dissemination of knowledge. Just as it now has sidewalk cafes and more than 200 art galleries where there were 18 a decade ago, it now has so many new institutes and centers that, together with its older academic institutions, it easily matches the intellectual vigor of contemporary London. It also has almost as many little magazines (where intellectuals float new ideas) and writers-in-residence as the Left Bank of Paris.

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Some years back I was asked to conduct an intra-agency review for the U.S. Commissioner of Education. I found that he had a very small staff working directly for him, and had a hard time getting the information he required to evolve policies he was interested in. In the same agency and building, 119 researchers were busy studying numerous aspects of education and issuing reports regularly. I visited them to discuss their becoming more responsive to the commissioner, and to *their* agency (and the country's) policy needs.

"Not on your life" was the unanimous response. Their pride, joy, and ambition was academic work. Indeed, their allies on the campus called me and warned that if the commissioner turned the research to "applied," they would appeal to their friends in Congress to gut the agency's research budget.

All over Washington, openly and secretly, — by government-hired PhD's from the CIA to the Census Bureau to NIMH — on the side and while at work, research is conducted and written up in reports that are indistinguishable from those prepared at the heights of the academic ivory towers from Stanford's Hoover Institute to MIT's Technology Square. It may be distressing to their department heads and to OMB, but it adds grist to the academic mills of W.M.U.

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